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Deposited in DRO:

02 December 2014

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Gambaudo, S. (2013) 'Citation as intimacy in Janet Frame's Autobiography.', in Scenes of intimacy : reading, writing and theorizing contemporary literature. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 55-71.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/scenes-of-intimacy-9781441107268/>

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Additional information:

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Citation and Intimacy in Janet Frame's Autobiography

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Janet Frame (1924-2004) was a New Zealand writer who published autobiographical and fictional work, short stories and poetry. She gained many literary accolades (for example, a CBE for Literature in 1983; the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1989) and has reached iconic status in her native New Zealand. In the western world, Frame is probably better known for her lifelong dealings with mental illness, an experience that Jane Campion dramatised in her award-winning film of the author, An Angel at My Table (Campion, 1989). Frame was diagnosed with schizophrenia in her early 20s, in 1945, and spent 8 years of her life in and out of psychiatric institutions in New Zealand. The diagnosis of schizophrenia was reversed in her late 30s, but psychiatric experience had an impact on the author's vision of herself. During her formative years, the young Janet worked very hard at liberating herself from what she perceived as imposed rules regarding how and what aspects of her literary self she should reveal. In this chapter, I am aiming to show how Frame's take on intimacy is entrenched in the literary treatment of family narratives she learnt from birth. With the help

of Judith Butler's theory of identity I am hoping to show that Janet Frame's practice of literary intimacy lies in her engagement with the concept of 'citation'.

Autobiography is traditionally regarded as the site where the author dedicates him/herself to revealing an intimacy of self. Revelation of the intimate would imply that such an intimate self, perhaps dormant, perhaps hidden, has been waiting to be revealed. Yet, this may not be the case. Among other explanatory discourses, the debates over the origin of one's self presuppose the existence of a biological core or divine intervention, environmental determinism, reincarnation, or discursive effect. One of the most recent and controversial theories in this domain is Judith Butler's concept of the 'citational self', introduced in 1990 with the publication of Gender Trouble (Butler, 1990). Butler's take on how citation facilitates the revelation of one's intimate self is particularly pertinent to the autobiographical exercise. She made her fame by insisting that what we perceive as a 'self' is no more than an effect of citation. True to its postmodern roots, the 'cited self' destabilizes the conception of the 'I' as the expression of a continuous, identified self, but her theory went a step further than postmodern critiques of the unified subject because she successfully proposed a framework that would explain the sense of 'identity' as well as critiquing the idea of a pre-existing form of essential selfhood. If identity was no longer the outcome of one's revelation of one's interiority, how could intimacy be resignified?

In the wake of Butler's work, Sidonie Smith partly addressed that question by discussing the link between autobiography and citation. 'Autobiographical performativity' (Smith et al., 1998, p. 108-15) would be an attack on the very idea of autobiography as a self-expressive act. Smith repeats Butler's argument that there is 'no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating. [...] the interiority of self that is

said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an effect of autobiographical storytelling' (Smith et al., 1998, pp. 108-9). Smith argues for the process of autobiographical writing as one of performativity. She therefore rejects the idea of autobiography as the means to make-believe in the autobiographer's real interiority. To suggest that autobiography is one of the revelatory modes of a trueness of self, re-enforces, she says, 'the foundational myth of autobiographical storytelling as self-expressive of an autonomous individualism' (Smith et al., 1998, p. 114). In the context of Butler's work, Smith's thesis is convincing. Indeed, autobiographies are the site of a literary mise-en-scène, at the cross-road between the writer's intention, socio-political permission and the reader's expectations. In what she calls 'tactical dis/identifications' (Smith et al., 1998, p. 110), Smith points to the importance of self-censorship in autobiographical work: the autobiographer 'adjusts, redeploys, resists, transforms discourses of autobiographical identity' (Smith et al., 1998, p. 111). Autobiographies, then, are the site where the author at once reveals his / her intimacy and censors it. Smith's application of Butlerian rhetoric to the field of autobiography is a step in the right direction in answering the question of intimacy in a theoretical climate where the existence of an interiority of self is doubted. Indeed, I will argue that Butler's academic (and political) engagement with finding an epistemic framework that would explain the mechanics of self revelation / censorship away from notions of a pre-existing self has much to offer to a study of intimacy. More precisely, I will argue that Butler's 'citational self' befits the autobiographical work of New-Zealand author Janet Frame.

In the early 1980s, Janet Frame published her three-part autobiography: To the Is-Land (1982), An Angel at My Table (1984a) and The Envoy From Mirror City (1984b). The publication of Frame's autobiography and later her official biography (King, 2000)

reinforced the image of the writer as an ambivalent character. Frame scholar Ruth Brown spends some time discussing this in her essay 'Beyond the Myth: Janet Frame Unframed':

Frame is seen as standing apart, remote, a bit mysterious, shrouded in a kind of mist of otherness created by an intellectuality whose brilliant originality elevates her to that rank of writers given to high seriousness and accorded iconic status in the New Zealand literary culture. (Brown, 2003, p. 122)

Brown finds that other critics (Williams, for example) are less charitable and see in Frame's success a shrewd management of self-image towards literary celebrity (Brown, 2003). There is then a tension between those who read Frame as the writer who successfully reveals the mysteries of inner selfhood, and those who see her success as the controlled promotion of a fabricated image. Frame is constructed as either a champion of intimate writing or as a master of disguise. But these opposed views of Frame need not be mutually exclusive. As we shall see, Frame uses citation as a means to express an intimacy of self, but also as a means to critique the very possibility of intimacy.

In the first part of her autobiography, To the Is-Land, Frame puts forward the idea of citation as the act by which the self is both revealed and concealed. The first volume of the autobiography chronicles her journey into adulthood and describes her formative years. Strangely, Frame's mother's influence is seldom considered as a key factor in the construction of a narrative of self. Yet, it seems to me that the place given to her mother is paramount to an understanding of the author. Frame's struggle to say who she is, is clearly intertwined with the struggle to master the rules of how to say it. Her autobiography describes

her effort to integrate different sets of rules (the family, school, friends, and so on) but in my reading, her mother has centre stage.

Importantly, Frame's autobiography also deals with her struggle to decipher the mechanics of self-regulation and the hidden purpose she sees in the exercise. To the Is-Land is filled with stories that describe the young Janet's battle with a citation of self that would both copy learnt narratives and be distinct from them. Indeed, Frame is, from an early age, sensitive to the contradictions of intimacy and ritually returns to the question of how to reveal herself to the world and how the world will reveal itself to her. The young Janet establishes and then tries to unravel the puzzle of self-expression. On the one hand, words have the power to reveal one's interiority to the world. But on the other, the same words also make unintelligible those other parts of the self that received family narratives do not accommodate. In To the Is-Land, Frame describes for example an excited seven year-old Janet eagerly reporting at the dinner table what she has experienced that day (Frame, 1990, p. 45). That afternoon, Janet had spent time with her best friend Poppy and learnt with delight the meaning of the word 'fuck', while the pair spied on Janet's sister Myrtle having sex with a local boy. When she proudly announces that her sister 'fucked' that afternoon, she is not met with parental interest in her newly acquired knowledge but with her irate father, who verbally and physically lashes out against his daughters; Myrtle is hit with a belt and Janet ordered to sever all links with Poppy (Frame, 1990, p. 45). The scene captures both the passion of the protagonists but especially the confusion of the child that one word should connote such opposites: intimacy on the one hand, and fear and solitude on the other. The child learns in that moment that certain experiences are self-defining to her, but that the sharing of intimacy necessitates the understanding of how to do revelation the polite way. In other words, censorship becomes the key to good intimacy while unrestricted intimacy is the

sure path to rebuff. This is further evidenced in Janet Frame's use of the term 'Ancestral' to explain the rules of expression.

The young Janet's battle to liberate herself from familial and social constraints equals to liberating herself from the ways of 'Ancestors', as she calls them throughout the autobiography. Frame uses the word 'Ancestor' with a capital 'A' to refer to influences during her upbringing. The capitalisation confers the sense of awe the ancestral narrative is supposed to inspire in her and Frame's overt mocking for the over-rated importance 'Ancestors' are afforded.¹ It seems at first reading that the term 'ancestor' could have quite happily been substituted for 'family' or 'environment'. But I think Frame is looking to encompass much more than this and the word 'ancestor' will undoubtedly have stronger connotations to a New Zealand readership familiar with Maori culture. 'Ancestor' in Frame is at the cross-roads between several discourses, including the cultural, familial, political and historical. It is deconstructable by definition, but also at another more unconscious and primal level, it is the ancestral legacy of our humanity that lies beyond discourse. The question of how we make the 'ancestral' mean through narrative is a question that Frame engages with throughout the autobiography.

The young Janet begins to grasp the idea that intimate revelation is tied to discursive formation from a very early age: content and form cannot be separated. From the beginning of To the Is-land, she observes how her mother (Lottie) frames the story of her daughter's birth with an obvious concern for its future insertion in the ancestral narrative. Janet's mother picks and censors elements of the birth experience that will confirm her (and by extension her daughter) as having made history at several levels. Frame tells us that she was delivered by the first female medical graduate in New Zealand; that her twin, unnamed, died after a few

weeks (repeating the great-grandmother's loss of two sets of twins); that Janet was 'always hungry' (Frame, 1990, p. 10) but that maternal milk was so abundant it fed both herself and other babies. Lottie thus makes of Janet's coming-to-existence an experience of historical, genealogical and heroic proportions: it is an experience in which the mother is the central character. Frame's birth is clearly not about baby Janet but about validating Lottie as an instrument of the country's history; the subject of genetic misfortune; and a heroic and virtuous figure, showing courage and generosity. In turn, Frame adopts her mother's style and begins to cite the ancestral model. The autobiographical narrative thus becomes the repository of several converging voices: one is Lottie's ancestral tale that the young Janet has integrated and that the narrator remembers; another re-cites this tale in what seems to me an overt parodying of the 'ancestral' legacy, in order to demark herself from it. This is better explained by turning to the description Frame gives us of her childhood.

Frame's mother, the narrator tells us, was strongly invested in the ritualistic revival of the past as the only mode of self-expression. Frame describes how she was conditioned to learn and use pre-agreed narratives of family history, the accurate performance of which became the condition to guarantee validation by and intimacy with other family members:

Mother, a rememberer and talker, [...] remembering her past as an exile remembers her homeland; Mother in a constant state of family immersion [...] and immersion so deep that it achieved the opposite effect of making her seem to be seldom at home, in the present tense, or like an unreal person with her real self washed away. (Frame, 1990, p. 8)

The children perceive their mother's immersion in the family as a maternal frenzy unleashed in order to re-call memories of her family life and of cultural events that marked her early

years. Lottie associates memories of her childhood with elation. She recites lists of ancestors and their actions and she performs acts that are a repeat of ancestral acts. But the cultural events that marked her youth are selected for the sense of dread and catastrophe they inspire (earthquakes, slavery, and the sinking of the Titanic, for example). Hence, citation is double-edged: there is the ‘voice of mystery and wonder’ and the ‘panicked, [...] earthquake-and-lightening voice’ (Frame, 1990, p. 29). The double-bind of the past is taught to the children who are requested to memorise and re-cite particular events in theatrical performances where the ancestors have centre-stage. Through citation, family passions (magical but catastrophic, doomed but euphoric) are magnified. The revelation of one’s intimacy is then presented as an oscillation between two voices, euphoric and despairing, where the one at once cancels but also compensates for the other.

Frame later tells us that her mother’s childhood was not one of happy intimacy but, on the contrary, one of neglect and solitude. While Frame draws no theoretical conclusions, the implications are there to be seen: Lottie’s polarised narratives (and later Janet’s) originated at the very point of Lottie’s lack, when the child she was split her world into two distinct categories: on the one hand she invented a world of wonderful imaginary characters (ancestors) that could support her need for intimacy far better than the real ancestors. On the other, neglect and solitude, catastrophic for the child, are contained outside the family circle in ‘events’ that come to signify disaster.

Lottie’s teachings of what intimacy entails, re-cited narratives, live performances, and ritualised bodily gestures and tones of voice, is experienced by her children as both the place where intimacy can be found and where it is denied. Jane Campion’s film captured very vividly the ritualised mise-en-scène of life events which, in order to be ‘shared’ and internalised as part of family history must be recast as theatrical performances. But Frame also insists on a less pleasant effect of this maternal compulsion to ‘theatralise’ the past.

While the children actively ‘perform’ to seek and share intimacy, they also experience performance as a haunting, a possession of their mother by ‘the space that another world and another time occupied in [their] mother’s life’ (Frame, 1990, p. 8). Against the maternal wish that the past should be ‘remembered as paradisaal’ (Frame, 1990, p. 8), Frame increasingly expresses her wish to escape in the search for a truer sense of self.

At the age of eight, Frame finds that she now has the literary maturity to appropriate and master the ancestral narrative, and to challenge its pretence to stand as the only narrative of her intimate self. This ‘discovery’ is the outcome of an event that changes the young Janet’s perception of both her mother’s truthfulness and by extension the truthfulness of her teachings. During the visit of the maternal grandmother, a possessive and judgemental woman, the young Janet becomes the spectator of exchanges between her mother and her grandmother and begins to suspect her mother’s confusion of closeness with theatrical performance. Frame conveys her consternation when her grandmother chastises Lottie for failing to stick to the ancestral narrative (Frame, 1990, p. 57). The child is not concerned with her mother’s welfare but rather recoils at the revelation of their similarity of selves. Mother (Lottie) and daughter (Janet) are strikingly alike in the way they express their intimate selves, in the manner they spell out who they are to the world. Indeed, Frame’s phenomenal memory and focus on poetic details mirror her mother’s own obsessive listing of genealogy and poetic despair; they both oscillate between high and low states of emotions and emotional oscillation signifies their common desire for good ancestry and the knowledge of its loss. Self-expression is thus found in the co-presence of euphoria/despair, in euphoria that despairs and in despair turned euphoric. Moreover, Frame identifies in her mother’s flights into imaginary worlds her own resistance to ancestral narratives. Poetic resistance becomes the means by which both daughter and mother convey a truer sense of being. Or to put it

differently, by defying established narratives they successfully reveal a more intimate sense of self:

She [mother] knew that we [children] knew now that her own mother had not been so perfect, after all, that she was just like all mothers around, [...] and when she told us about the birds of the air, flying down to feed from Grandma Godfrey's hand, Mother was really talking about herself [...].
(Frame, 1990, p. 58)

Interestingly, Lottie's narrative of self (the birds flying down to feed off her mother's hand), effectively a theatrical fabrication (a lie), is now recast as a truer expression of self. The young Janet can now truly see who her mother is in the fairy tale Lottie creates about herself. It conveys both Lottie's resistance to ancestral imposition upon the self and the imaginary reconstruction of what is more truly desired. During the grandmother's visit, Lottie is torn between satisfying her mother's demands, preserving the ancestral lie she created to counterbalance her own disappointment, and meeting her children's needs for a more authentic intimacy. Incapable of choosing between conflicting conceptions of 'family intimacy', Lottie loses the allegiance of both her mother and her children, assumes a passive attitude and falls into a melancholic state.

For Janet, this moment is pivotal in understanding the true origin of what she perceives as intimacy, and developing a critical eye for those areas of expression that mark intimacy as a coded narration of events. She comes to realise the role of citation in the narration of one's self and the relationship between narration and intimacy. In time, Frame will grow very

skilful at flushing out what constitutes the fallacy of intimacy, and develops a strategy of resistance to forced (fallacious to her) intimacies that will become her take on truer intimacy. Yet, on Frame's own admission, recourse to citational tactics (resorting to more fabrication to resist fabrication) becomes the family trait that binds daughter and mother in an intimacy Frame feels uneasy about and which she prefers to put down to necessity rather than literary choice. As she put it: 'I may have polished this shell of memory because it is constantly with me, not because I have varnished it for display' (Frame, 1990, p. 13). If Frame is admitting to an environmentally motivated interiority of self that pre-destined her to become the writer she became, she does not so easily capitulate before the evidence, nor does she resign herself to an interiority modelled on her mother's. Her following years will be spent reclaiming Lottie's citational strategy towards a more adapted, more singular, indeed more 'polished' and ironically more truthful sense of who she is.

The end of the maternal claim to a paradisal past also coincides with the end of Frame's naive performances of intimacy. Frame recognises in her mother's disappointing ploys her own desire to resist the terms by which intimacy is regulated. Like Lottie, Janet longs for an autobiographical narrative that would enable her to achieve the impossible: to become self-reliant and yet intimate, to cut herself from ties she experiences as oppressive and still convey intimacy to / with others. Beyond autobiographical revelations, Frame is also engaged throughout the autobiography in a self-critique of intimacy and writing. The final words of the autobiography convey the same message of hesitation, of being torn between keeping experience hidden and the imperative to tell: 'You know it's time to pack this collection of years for your journey to Mirror City.' (Frame, 1990, pp. 434-5) For Frame, Mirror City represents 'the transformation of ordinary facts and ideas into a shining palace of mirrors' (Frame, 1990, p. 434). Yet, the fabrication of Mirror City, the writing of intimacy then, will

mean the desecration of phenomenological experience that writing alters and only reflects: ‘Take care. Your recent past surrounds you, has not yet been transformed. Do not remove yet what may be the foundation of a palace in Mirror City’ (Frame, 1990, p. 434). At the end, Frame still concludes in favour of waiting, of not ending the autobiography. But these words conclude some four hundred pages of autobiographical revelations. Her waiting is hesitance rather than reluctance, and a means to answer the question of intimacy with another question. Indeed, Frame remains aware to the end of the double-bind of intimacy, that it is at once an act of dissemination and dissimulation. While being aware of her limitations as a writer, or perhaps because of them, she devised a ‘technique’ to dampen the dissimulating effect of writing intimacy. In what follows, I would like to return to Frame’s journey towards authorial maturity and show how she succeeded (at least partly) in making resistance to dissimulation the site of enhanced intimacy.

We have seen that both mother and daughter share a desire to liberate themselves from ancestral constraints and this desire goes well beyond the expected wish to grow up and fly with one’s own wings. It is also a wish to sever the link from bad blood, while at the same time compensating for the loss of ‘family’ this severing entails. If ancestors are unreliable, the young Janet puts her trust in literature and focuses her energy on self-teaching the citational tactics that will give her the means of self-expression she covets. Frame tells us that as she matured, a more thought-out sense of intimacy emerged. This is felt in the autobiography through a change of style that is both that of Frame imparting maturity to the child she was, but also the child’s own choices. For example, from the age of eight, Janet makes more direct attacks on the adult world, and these are events that the adult Frame remembers and reports, not without humour. The reports are enmeshed with retrospective assessments of the young Janet’s critical engagement with herself and the world, and of how

she began to spell out the criteria for a narrative of self that would become her literary trademark.

Criticism and resistance to adult constraint mark Frame's teenage years. But again, this is more than the clichéd image of the hormonal adolescent. More interestingly, this resistance to constraint is felt at several levels of her development: it is felt in her adult assessment of those formative years and in the autobiographical exercise, in short in content and form. The literary embedding of a lost past in the 'present' of writing creates the superimposition of different moments, which, under the writer's pen, amount to a new time trail that defies the passing of time. But it does not mean Frame has found the means to beat the problem of Mirror City. The past and present are fully entwined also as part of a literary technique that reveals the arbitrariness of the writing exercise and the author's rejection of the omniscience that is supposed to come with hindsight. For example, when she tells us she felt 'physical discomfort', 'restricted', 'sealed', 'captured', 'imprisoned' and 'powerless' (Frame, 1990, p. 116), the same set of words literally refer to the tightness of her clothes that do not fit the growing child or the constraining world she grew up in, but they also signify the adult author objecting to literary conventions cramping her style then and now.

When she talks of a 'strong attraction to ordinary objects that might in the end become extraordinary' (Frame, 1990, p. 117), the reference to her own revolt against familial, social and literary conventions is hardly disguised. Those objects are conventionally meant to be ordinary, or more to the point, Frame is supposed to see them as such. It is the subtext behind ordinary, the 'meant to' or 'supposed to' that Frame is attracted to. In systematically grabbing ordinary objects and transforming them via literature into extraordinary ones, she undoes (and thus shows) the process by which the object is averaged in the first place. This includes herself as object. She revolts against the averaging of self and the autobiography is very much the space where she defies conventions about self and about autobiography to share

something unique, something extraordinary, something intimate. The extra-ordinary self we are presented with has nothing to do with the fantasy of a super-self. Rather, 'extra-ordinary' refers to the wish for singularity, for the recognition of her (and by extension others') unique interiority. Time and time again, Frame expresses her fear that in respecting conventions, she is agreeing to an ordinariness of self where her unique interior is evened out to an average of self-hood:

Well, my sister had died, and the cats had died, and my brother had epilepsy, but for all that and for all my newly acquired or acknowledged imagination, I and my life, I felt, were excessively ordinary. [...] I felt keenly [...] Shelley's probable disapproval of me, for he had complained of Harriet that she was interested only in looking at hats. I resolved I would never be like Shelley's wife. (Frame, 1990, p. 132)

It is in many ways a complaint against the normalising of self that Frame is voicing. Because of her investment in literary expression, her work becomes the site of a critique on socialization and on the promotion of the self when it has been levelled out to an average, when it becomes a 'benchmark of the self', so to speak, shared by a community: 'women' are interested in hats and dull; 'poets' are imaginative and exciting. Hence, with a bold statement - 'They think I'm going to be a schoolteacher, but I'm going to be a poet.' (Frame, 1990, p. 132) - she defies 'them' and sets poet-hood as the antidote to dullness. More precisely, poetry becomes, in the young Janet's mind, the condition to resist becoming ordinary. Her only career path should be to embrace the teaching profession: she resolves instead to become the unimaginable for a girl growing up in 1930s New Zealand: a poet. But there is no feminist undertone here. The young Janet's rebellion targets something else - the literary formation of the acceptable self - and actively seeks resistance to this compulsion to the ordinary.

In the hope of escaping the ancestral influence, Frame methodically applies herself to changing her relationship with the past. Her predilection for ‘techniques of making [...] things last’ (Frame, 1990, p. 86) that she had inherited from her mother’s teachings become the focus of self-analysis. In ‘making things last’ both mother and daughter found a means to preserve a sense of stability in the face of an ever-changing reality and a defence against an unsatisfactory past. But where Lottie defended against change by forbidding deviation from recited narratives, effectively forbidding loss and keeping it at bay, Frame became famous for the skills she developed as a writer of loss. Indeed, she describes in To the Is-Land how she finds ‘solace in such learning of all those new worlds, of changes in the past’ (Frame, 1990, p. 91). Frame thus develops a skill in pinpointing those moments in the past that carry within their fixed narratives a sense of transformation, of loss, of death, and of change. The literary treatment of those moments, mostly magnifying their phenomenological truth, enables her to recapture that ‘something’ that was believed lost. Arguably, Frame’s strategy is on a par with the maternal injunction to defend against loss, but Frame finds her sense of self not in the avoidance of loss but on the contrary in the moment of loss. Loss increasingly becomes one of the criteria by which Frame finds the intimacy of self she covets. The author will later publish numerous semi-autobiographical and fictional pieces in which she actively seeks to write about those experiences where the main character has lost ‘something’ (death or madness, for example; see Gambaudo, 2012). That ‘something’ becomes Frame’s preferred literary theme. The particular thematic formations of loss are those that one expects to find: for example, death, insanity or exile. But more unusually, ‘loss’ becomes increasingly synonymous with ‘constraint’; where there is constraint, there is censorship and therefore loss. Frame’s strategy to better recapture herself thus goes along the following sequence: to reveal who she is, she must resist ancestral constraint. To resist constraint, she must resist

loss. To resist loss, she must seek out the lost object and recapture it by 'making it last'. In Frame's work, the lost 'something' that must be resisted becomes diversified from a family-contingent sense of constraint into a community-contingent one. Possibly, this diversification stems from her early belief that nothing of significance happened to her that could count as 'something lost'. At age eight, the young Frame deplores her inability to fulfil the criteria for poet-hood (to be melancholic), because she has not at that point in her life, known 'loss'. In her own child perception: 'How could I ever be a poet when I was practical, never absent-minded, I liked mathematics, and my parents were alive?' (Frame, 1990, pp. 92-3). Her following years will be marked by the recasting of 'loss' away from 'loss of a loved one' and towards the loss of 'something'. Frame found in that 'something' the terrain where she could express a singular literary practice and therefore a more intimate sense of self:

In spite of my longing [to be a dreamer], I remained uncomfortably present within the world of fact, more literal than imaginative. I wanted an imagination that would inhabit a world of fact, descend like a shining light upon the ordinary life of Eden Street, and not force me to exist in an elsewhere. (Frame, 1990, p. 101)

Frame finds she conveys her interiority better by making of herself the writer of the mundane and bearing witness to the painful experience of a 'passing' of everyday reality. On her own admission (Frame, 1975) the author actively sought those life experiences out of which she could extract a sense of 'loss'. She became famous also for writing about experiences that seemingly contain little in terms of events or actions. For example, in many places, the narrator of To the Is-land dwells on what could appear dull, uninspiring and pointless

descriptions of agricultural chores or the details of a walk in the countryside. Indeed, some critics have expressed their ‘disappointment over the author’s ostensibly laconic and impassive’ (Henke, 2000, p. 652) rendering of events. They are referring to those parts of her work where seemingly nothing happens. More interestingly, they are referring to those events in Frame’s life which should inspire some form of excitement; for example, the candid depiction of her suicide attempts, or of her predilection for reading books in cemeteries, or of her loss of sanity that led to her incarceration in a psychiatric hospital. Frame successfully conveys such extra-ordinary events as if they were no more significant than a stroll along the river. In another example, The Reservoir, she does the opposite. The short story describes the journey of three children who, disobeying adults, decide to walk to the local reservoir. By the end of the day, nothing has happened: the children are back safely and their parents remain unaware of their disobedience. Yet, the reader is led to believe that to the children, the walk to the forbidden reservoir is a self-defining moment in their lives. Such narratology has led some critics to argue in favour of the author’s mental instability, suggesting autism or social anxiety disorder (Abrahamson, 2007; Heath, 2009). While their careful tracking down of possible symptomatology in Frame’s biography and autobiographical work can lead to conclusions in favour of some form of mental disorder, I also think they are partly missing the point. I would suggest instead that Frame’s interest in content that signifies loss is a form of authorial resistance to lingering maternal injunctions to be intimate the ancestral way. She became a specialist in narrating the extra-ordinariness of the mundane (agricultural chores, the silhouette of rabbits against the green backdrop of a hill or seagulls defecating on a garden gnome) or narrating the routine humdrum of extra-ordinary events (how to kill yourself or life on a psychiatric ward). The latter was especially significant for Frame given her obvious connection with extra-ordinariness (‘madness’ and literary fame). Indeed, for a

big part it was the loss of her 'madness', of her claim to an extraordinary (schizophrenic) self, that became the stepping stone towards a more systematic use of citation in her work.

An analysis of Frame's literary treatment of her alleged madness is very telling of the key role the mis/diagnosis of mental disorder played in shaping her sense of intimacy. Her emancipation from psychiatric constraint was much less liberating than she had imagined it would be and the reversal of diagnosis highlighted the supporting role constraint played in her life. Indeed, in renouncing the label 'schizophrenic', Frame found that her own survival mechanisms were under threat: 'Now, without my schizophrenia, I had only my ordinary self to use to try to explain my distress' (Frame, 1990, p. 382) she says at the end of the third autobiographical volume, The Envoy from Mirror City. From age twenty-one, Frame's life was very much organised around her psychiatric condition and 'schizophrenia' was pivotal to her day-to-day existence. First, being diagnosed gave her a right to public assistance, in the form of financial help (the equivalent of today's disability benefits) and access to health care in particular psychiatric organisations. Second, in the wake of R.D. Laing's work, the 1950s anti-psychiatry movement provoked a rise of interest in 'madness narratives' and Frame found her own experience opened publishing opportunities (for example Faces in the Water, 2009). It also regulated intimacy. Her schizophrenia (as she put it) had become a defining characteristic of the self, a self-explanatory term that preceded her in her exchanges with others. Hence, the manner she presented her schizophrenic-self played a crucial part in Frame's aptitude to connect with others. It was in fact one of the features that regulated a certain dynamic of intimacy: it could be the pretext to request others' help or on the contrary it could be the justification for choosing isolation. In return, she became the object of others' curiosity or concern or frustration. In short, schizophrenia was the key to intimacy and to its avoidance.

‘Having’ a psychiatric condition made Frame’s narrative of self only a partially cited one. From a literary perspective she could, to some extent, claim an inherence of interiority which she alone could not reveal. Intimacy then relied on the expert intervention of medical diagnosis, for example, or of biographers au fait of the long history poets shared with madness, or of feminists who understood the relationship between womanhood and madness, or of any other narrative that could explain the relationship between madness and social intelligibility. Indeed, without her schizophrenia what would she use to signify who and what she was, and demark herself from the ordinary? The diagnosis reversal (informally relayed to Frame in the late 1950s and medically certified in writing in 1974) became the turning point in Frame’s move towards a fully cited intimacy of self.

Following diagnosis-reversal, Frame increasingly moves away from a naturalistic explanation of self and towards recasting ‘her mad self’ in terms of a ‘doing’ of mental illness.

Schizophrenia changes from something that she has to something that she did in order to gain intelligibility in an environment that required her to do so. Frame is referring not only to psychiatric hospitals, but also to the world outside hospitals. Her autobiographical work has many examples of awkward moments when she believes medical staff, family members, friends and publishers anxiously expect her behaviour to confirm the diagnosis. Frame suggests that she increasingly learnt to slip into character and performed according to a script observed during internment. The diagnosis-reversal equals the withdrawal of her life script, and leaves her to undo its performative mechanics and replace them with self-made ones. ‘No longer, I hoped, dependent on my ‘schizophrenia’ for comfort and attention and help, but with myself as myself, I again began my writing career.’ (Frame, 1990, p. 385) At the end of her autobiographical trilogy, Frame notes how literature again becomes the space where she

seeks self-salvation. She re-appropriates her schizophrenic self and a more literary citation of self becomes the source of intimacy.

Until the end of her life and beyond her death, Frame remains the champion of a certain form of expression in which readers find the accomplishment of their own struggle to reveal who they are. If we follow Frame's lead, successful intimacy is the struggle to find a way to tell the world about one's unique experience of 'self' in a context favouring more typical, and therefore less intimate expressions of identity. Janet Frame's rise to international literary recognition intensified following the release of New Zealand director Jane Campion's film about her, An Angel at My Table. The Women's Press took the opportunity to publicise Frame's work by re-issuing her autobiographical trilogy in one single volume. While this helped Frame's international career as a writer, it also brought her into the public eye. Her work and life became the focus of a particular type of interest and scrutiny, a voyeuristic curiosity for Frame's lived experience of 'madness' and its 'treatment', which Campion had so vividly captured in her film. Some critics and reviewers went 'looking for Janet Frame', inspecting her work and her life to confirm a diagnosis of mental illness (Abrahamson, 2007). Most critics defend her oddness and find in it a more intimate understanding of what it is to be human (Henke, 2000; Delrez, 2002; Brown, 2003; Gambaudo, 2012). The question of Frame's deliberate focus on areas of human experience that resist accepted forms of citation (the 'something lost' I described earlier) remains key to understanding this author's engagement with intimacy. It is, in my opinion, one way of explaining why some critics feel the need to maintain the possibility of Frame's 'mad' narrative. The maintenance of the 'mad' Frame is even more pertinent in the current theoretical context.

Frame's autobiography now appeals to a middle-class readership invested in the idea of the self as property (King, 2000). In the wake of Judith Butler's innovative intervention in the field of identity theory in 1990, the focus on intelligible and unintelligible (or 'queer', to borrow from Butler) areas of experience have allowed theories of self to take new directions. A Butlerian framework befits Frame's literary style. Frame's narrative of self defies any pretention to finding a recipe for 'doing intimacy' or instructions on how to use one's self towards better intimacy. Indeed, it is precisely those consensual formulas that her work reveals as antithetic to intimacy. I would go as far as suggesting that Frame's work even supports the opposite. Anything that is not intimate, that is, anything that does not reveal the unique character of individual experience, any attempt at mirroring, copying or repeating consensual narratives of self are for her markers of personal sabotage and thus a form of 'madness'. As far as the self as commodity is concerned, Frame offers us the possibility of literature as critique. Abiding by established 'recipes' of self enables the proprietor to display their adherence to agreed formulae. It would seem then that following consensual recipes would be the path towards a common intimacy. Yet Frame tells us something else. Under her pen, the exposure of her mother's attachment to ancestral narratives, Frame's own predilection for peculiar areas of experience, and those experiences that connote loss, become the sites of a critique of the very idea of self and of intimate experience. The need to maintain the possibility of Frame's 'mad' narrative could thus have two motives: intimacy is the act by which the individual consents to particular rituals while pathology is the act by which Frame prevents intimacy; or intimacy is a singular experience approximated only through extraordinary (mad) expression. Either way, 'mad narrative' becomes the condition to intimacy. My reading of Frame's citational tactics towards intimacy aimed to show something else. Inasmuch as we can talk about 'queering' narratives as critical methodology,

then Frame's 'queering' tactics says something interesting about autobiography and intimacy. This is what I will finish with.

Frame's take on intimacy shows a paradox. She was famously a very private person and was certainly not the socialite her rise to fame required her to become. Faced with undesired critical attention, her response was to direct attention at her work, rather than herself, effectively encouraging us to find her in the literary treatment of experience. Citation is both the way towards intimacy and its avoidance but avoidance goes well beyond the refusal to connect. She successfully used a citation-of-self in her autobiographical work to reveal an intimacy of self she felt she was denied by others' citational modes. The cited self was constituted as the author gained independence from maternal and psychiatric narratives. The dissolution of imposed narratives of self coincides with the emergence of a more intimate self. To begin intimacy, Frame warns us, is to confront ourselves with myth (Frame, 1990, p. 7). In her case, it meant the unravelling of a narrative peopled with 'ancestors'. The very exercise of writing intimacy ends with the waiting of what she calls 'the Envoy' (Frame, 1990, p. 435). The Envoy is that character who has expectations from the author, a force that propels the narrative forward and asks the author to deliver 'autobiography'. The Envoy is even more powerful as a trope because it is not clear who s/he is, nor who sent him/her. Is the Envoy Frame's agent? Her readers? Herself? Was he/she sent by society? God? Inner desire? Frame does not specify, but what matters to her is that the Envoy should be an expectant figure. As Frame delivers the last line of her autobiography – 'And the Envoy waits' (Frame, 1990, p. 435) - hopes for a completed autobiography are not fulfilled. Thus, to the end, the literary practice of intimacy lies in not satisfying the expectant Envoy. Janet Frame will not abide by the rules that could regulate the autobiographer. She will not normalise her work,

nor deliver the expected finished product. To the end, she remains critical of ‘techniques’ of intimacy, even her own, and finds intimacy in the dissolution of its formation.

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¹ In what follows, I am using 'ancestor' as a Frame-specific term without a capital letter.